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**Testimony before the Human Services Committee
SB 32: AA Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations
Concerning Social Services**

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Good morning Senator Doyle, Representative Walker, and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Jude Carroll. I am submitting this testimony as a private citizen, but I would like you to know that I'm the Director of the Connecticut Kids Count Project at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a 100-year old statewide nonprofit organization that works to end poverty and to engage, equip, and empower all families in Connecticut to build a secure future.

I'm here today to testify against Sections 20 through 27 of SB 32: An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Social Services. These sections contain language eliminating the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI) and transferring the duties of the Commission to the Department of Social Services (DSS). As a hearing-impaired person who has used the Commission's services, I am here to object strongly to these proposed changes. I also oppose the reduction in staffing proposed by the Governor in her 2011 state budget.

My Personal Experience

Before commenting on the elimination of the Commission, I would like to tell you briefly about my experiences as a deaf/hearing-impaired individual. I lost my hearing in one ear in my early 30s (early 1980s). The medical condition that caused the loss was quite incapacitating physically and caused my hearing loss to occur gradually over time. The same condition affected my second ear in the early 1990s, again causing physical incapacitation. For the next 15 plus years, I was able to function adequately, through grit and determination, although I was legally classified as disabled.

Now, I have experienced another significant decline. I have difficulty using the telephone without captioning, hearing at and participating in meetings, and functioning at large events. All of these are required for my job. Each decline in my hearing has created more isolation and feelings of depression and anxiety.

My Use of CDHI

When my second ear was affected, I turned to the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired. A counselor spoke with my supervisor about how the organization could accommodate me and help me do my job. I went to see a Commission counselor several times who helped me with the devastation I was experiencing. You may not know this but depression is considered a major side

effect of hearing loss, and perhaps all disabilities. As my hearing continues to decline, I am learning sign language and will need the assistance of an interpreter to do my job. I'm highly educated, own my own home, and strongly wish to stay employed. I will do whatever I can to obtain assistance and assistive devices that will help me work.

I consider myself lucky to have family and friends who help me physically and emotionally. And, I know that there are many deaf and hearing-impaired people who don't have the support I have, who don't know where to go for help, have little financial where-with-all to buy hearing aids and batteries or pay for counseling. Many deaf and hearing-impaired people, and those with other disabilities, are often the first to be laid off in hard times because employers view them as problems that are too troublesome to deal with.

Reducing Programs that Help People Work Does Not Make Sense

I am not opposed to government consolidation. The transfer of CDHI to DSS which occurred several years ago appears to be working. I do not, however, support the watering down of CDHI's role or the transfer of responsibilities from CDHI to DSS. CDHI was originally established as a statewide coordinating agency and in accordance with that charge performed its job well. As written, it is unclear whether or not all members of the current CDHI staff will be transferred to DSS and whether their job descriptions will remain the same. Proposed language eliminates the executive director's position, and the Commission's role is changed from coordination to advisory only. **Language changes of this sort would allow the DSS Commissioner and his staff to run current CDHI services as minimally as possible without legislative oversight.**

Governor Rell's Proposed Budget

I would like to note that Governor Rell's budget for CDHI proposes a cut of almost \$300,000, approximately 1/3 coming from rent and 2/3 from personnel. To me, this is another example of balancing the budget on the backs of those least able to absorb them. Other changes should be considered such as charging a small fee for services, possibly on a sliding scale.

In addition, it is interesting that in the Governor's proposed budget, the narrative for the Commission included the numbers for interpreting services for 2009. Interpreting services were increased by 5 percent over the 2008 level; almost 11,000 interpreting events were provided in 2009. Obviously, the need for support is not going away. Anecdotally, I have heard that the number of deafened soldiers returning from the Middle East is increasing. To my knowledge, the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs does not employ interpreters. All of these issues must be considered when you and the Appropriations Subcommittee make your decisions. Please listen to the needs of Connecticut's deaf and hearing-impaired citizens.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.